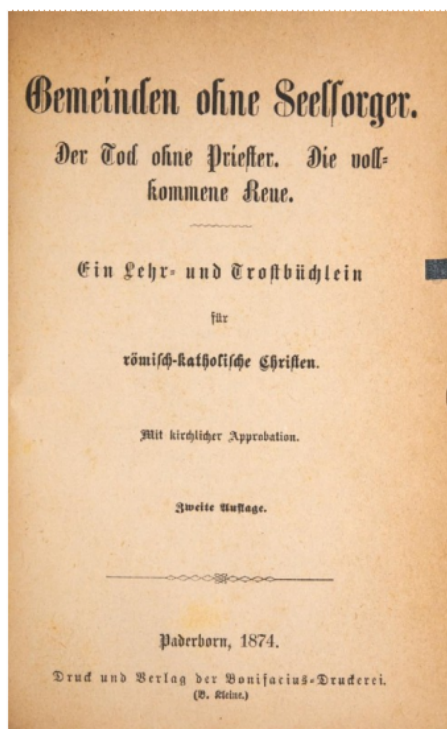


# Excerpts from Parishes without a priest. Death without a priest. Perfect contrition.

A teaching and consoling booklet  
for Roman Catholic Christians.

Originally printed in Paderborn, Germany in 1874



<https://christianfaith.info/parishes-without-a-priest/>



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# Note

Excerpts from the book „Parishes without a priest. Death without a priest. Perfect contrition. – A teaching and consoling booklet for Roman Catholic Christians.“ („Gemeinden ohne Seelsorger. Der Tod ohne Priester. Die vollkommene Reue. – Ein Lehr- und Trostbüchlein für römisch-katholische Christen.“) Printed in Paderborn in 1874. „With ecclesiastical approbation.“

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*Part I*

PARISHES WITHOUT A PRIEST

## Chapter 1

*“Stand firm in your holy Catholic faith, in your love and loyalty to the Holy Church! Suffer and tolerate anything rather than deny her and her teachings in the slightest!”*

To deny the faith is to deny Christ and exclude oneself from eternal salvation. “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 10:32-33) That is why millions of holy martyrs preferred to endure all torments and the bitterest death rather than fall away from the faith. Now they triumph eternally in heaven!

One must not even give the impression of denying the faith. During the persecution of Decius, fearful Christians bought a certificate that they had sacrificed to idols, even though they had not actually done so. They were equated with those who had formally apostatized, excluded from the Church and only readmitted after years of public penance. Catholics, do not be guilty of a similar sin by signing petitions or other documents in which principles of the Catholic faith are openly or covertly denied! Get no document testifying that you have sacrificed to the idol of the spirit of the age! “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and

forfeits his life?" (Mt 16:26)

[...] Catholics! Observing the commandments of the Church, especially the commandment of fasting and abstinence from meat, is under certain circumstances a profession of faith, transgressing them is a denial of faith. Remember this!

## Chapter 2

*“Keep away from a priest who has no communion with your bishop and the supreme pastor of the Church!”*

Communion in religious matters with heretics and schismatics, that is, with those separated from the Church by heresy or schism, is strictly forbidden. It implies an indirect denial of faith, the danger of apostasy and a scandal for the faithful. Catholics are therefore not allowed to take part in the worship of a sect, enter into marriage before its pastors, receive sacraments from them or have their dead buried by them.

This prohibition applies in all circumstances, even if it concerns the immediate family, relatives, friends or superiors. If, for example, the husband or father has joined a sect, the wife and the children may not accompany him to the sect's church services under any circumstances. The same applies if a sacramental act is performed in the family or acquaintance by an unlawful clergyman, or if a funeral service is held for a deceased person. (The accompaniment of a Protestant deceased person to the churchyard is regarded as a civil act and is permitted because no one can conclude from this that there is a communion in religious faith).

Should any inconvenience arise in the family from the observance of this ecclesiastical prohibition, remember Jesus' serious words: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37)



[...]

In the 16th century, the cruel Queen Elizabeth passed a law in England that all Catholics should attend Protestant services on Sundays: those who did not do so had to pay a monthly fine of 20 pounds sterling, that is, 400 marks in our money! And yet, according to a decision by Pope Paul V, Catholics were not allowed to comply with the law, even with the proviso that attendance should be purely external. At the time of the French Revolution, Pius VI declared that participation in a baptism performed by an intruding clergyman was illegal.

Note: Because the indelible character of the Sacrament of Holy Orders remains on the soul of even an apostate priest, he can still truly consecrate bread and wine at Mass, provided he does everything correctly. (\*) But our Roman Catholic faith teaches that such a celebration of the Mass is not a service to God but a robbery, not an unbloody but in a sense a bloody renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, not a source of blessing but a source of ruin for the one who offers it as well as for the participants. The absolution granted by such a priest in confession, on the other hand, is not only illicit, but also invalid, null and void; for it is not only a sacramental, but also a judicial act, for the validity of which a special authorization (approbation) is required in addition to ordination, which is why the Fourth Commandment of the Church also stipulates: "You shall confess your sins at least once a year to an ordained priest." A priest who has apostatized or been suspended from hearing confessions no longer has this authorization and can therefore no longer validly absolve people. In the same way, a deposed secular judge can no longer pass a legally binding judgment. The fact that a bishop who is separated from the Church cannot grant these and other spiritual powers is of course a matter of Catholic teaching and of the principle: "No one can give what he himself does not have." Nor can the spiritual power be conferred by the patron or the congregation. [...]

Therefore, should a Catholic ever be asked which priest he would like to receive the sacraments from, he would answer with St. Jerome, the Church Father: "He who stands by the throne of Peter, he is the one I go to!"

## Chapter 3

# *“Then strengthen one another in the faith!”*

In order to remain strong in faith, you must first avoid everything that weakens your faith. This includes intimate contact with people with animosity toward the Church. Through such contact, a believer is ten times more likely to be deceived than an unbeliever converted. This also includes reading anti-church newspapers. How many who have been shipwrecked in their faith have to attribute this misfortune to their newspapers, which are constantly, sometimes openly, sometimes covertly hostile to the Church! [...]

In order to strengthen one another in the faith, the faithful must edify one another through a pious way of life and unite closely together. [...] In cases of illness or accident, friends and neighbors must, if possible, take the place of the priest. If someone suffers a disadvantage because of his faith or even loses his employment or livelihood, his fellow believers must come to his aid by providing support, work and so on. Faith must be a living covenant, and the covenant of faith must also be a covenant of love. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35).

## Chapter 4

*“Educate and then teach your children, Christian parents, with redoubled care in the Catholic faith, so that they may remain faithful to it!”*

Teach them the truths of our holy religion, all the more carefully if the religious instruction given at school should give you cause for concern. Teach your little ones the necessary articles of faith and prayers, tell them from the biblical story of the creation of the world, of the fall, of the dear Savior and so on. Let the older ones learn the catechism diligently, listen to them and explain to them what they have learned as best you can. (\*) On Sundays and holidays, the head of the household should gather all the members of the household around him in order to read or have read to them a passage from the Handpostille [a book with the daily Mass readings], a book about the lives of the saints or from another edifying book.

Above all, encourage your children to pray and set them a good example yourself. Christian mother! Let your children kneel down in your presence in the morning and say their morning prayers; do not let them go to bed at night without prayer!

## Chapter 5

*[You should spare no effort to participate in Holy Mass celebrated by a legitimate priest]*

[...]

The commandments of the Church are binding as long as their fulfillment does not become physically or morally impossible. So if a parish is deserted, but there are still priests in the neighborhood, those faithful must, provided there is no legal impediment, hear Holy Mass there on Sunday, go to Confession and receive Communion there, especially around Easter time, celebrate their marriages and have their children baptized. If the journey is long and arduous, the reward will be all the greater.

If there is no longer a legitimate priest nearby, then perhaps the post office or railroad will make it possible to visit a more distant Catholic church, even if not every Sunday, but at least on higher feasts, to celebrate Easter there and have a marriage blessed. A monetary sacrifice for such a great cause should not be shunned; the one blessed with temporal goods should not deny his thirsty brother a contribution.

[...]

## Chapter 6

*“Better edify one another, you Christian fathers, mothers and members of the household, through common prayer and holy songs and chants, before you participate in sacrilegious services.” (Bishop of Paderborn.)*

[...]

If public (Roman Catholic) services are no longer held in a parish, then home devotions must be cultivated all the more, i.e. communal morning and evening prayers, readings from the Handpostille, the lives of the saints, the rosary, etc. [...]

The public service usually held by the priest is replaced by a lay service. On Sundays and feast days, those who cannot attend church services away from home gather in their church or, if it is impossible to use the church, in another suitable place. One of the men (see 1 Cor. 14:34) will lead the congregation. [...] After the profession of faith – it would be nice if the whole congregation prayed it aloud – the Epistle and the Gospel of the day are read by the leader of the congregation, after which an explanation

from the Handpostille or a sermon from an approved sermon book can follow. Intercessions for the general intentions of Christianity, for the afflicted Church, for the absent bishops and priests; for the congregation, that all its members may stand firm in faith and in the love and grace of God, that it may soon receive a shepherd again; the church patron and the saints, whose relics are in the altar (or altars) of the church, may be especially invoked; finally, prayers for the sick, the dying and the deceased.

The afternoon service can be alternated with the rosary and the usual confraternity devotions in the parish. Devotion to the Divine Heart of Jesus is urgently recommended by the Major Pastors. Where a Way of the Cross has been erected, it should be diligently prayed not only privately, but also publicly and communally.

[...]

## Chapter 7

*“If you lack priests who are faithful to the Church, have your children baptized by faithful lay people.”  
(Bishop of Paderborn)*

[...]

According to the teaching of our Holy Church, baptism administered correctly by a layperson, whether male or female, Catholic or non-Catholic, Christian or non-Christian, is valid and, in case of need, permitted and even required. However, three things are necessary for the valid administration of the sacrament:

- 1) that the right matter and
- 2) that the right form is used,
- 3) that one has the intention of doing what the Church does.

The matter of baptism is blessed baptismal water, in its absence holy water (\*) and, if neither is available, ordinary, pure, natural water. [...]

2. The form, that is, the words with which baptism is administered, is: “I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” Nothing may be omitted. [...]

The matter and form must be correctly connected with each other. One and the same person must pour the water and say the words. It would be invalid if one person merely poured the water and another said the baptismal formula. The pouring and saying of the words must take place at the same time, so that both form a single act. If water were to be poured

first and then the words spoken after a noticeable interruption, the baptism would be invalid.

3. The intention. The person baptizing must have the intention to do what the Church does. This intention need not be expressly evoked at the moment of the act, but it is sufficient that it has been evoked beforehand and still continues in force. The will to confer the Sacrament of Baptism is sufficient, since the intention to do what the Church does is inherent in it.

The act of baptism

[...] The godfather or godmother holds the child during the baptism, while the other godparent places their right hand on the child. The person baptizing takes the vessel with baptismal water, holy water or natural water, pours it three times over the child's head in the shape of a cross and speaks the words slowly, clearly and attentively once during the pouring:

"N. (here he gives the child's name), I baptize thee in the name of the Father † (here he pours for the first time) and of the Son † (here he pours for the second time) and of the Holy † Ghost." (here he pours for the third time).

Three pourings and the cross shape are not required for validity, but are prescribed by the Church. The water must touch the skin of the head or the forehead and flow off. If it is baptismal water or holy water, it is collected in a vessel and poured into the fire.

[...] Very appropriately, the baptismal covenant can be renewed by all those present on this occasion. The name of the child, the day and hour of birth, the name and place of residence of the parents, the day of baptism, the name of the person being baptized and the godparents should be carefully recorded.

[...] Only those persons may be taken as godparents who (in the absence of the parents) offer full guarantee for the moral and religious upbringing of the child. If there is reasonable doubt as to whether a baptism has been validly conferred, it is to be repeated conditionally: one baptizes as usual, but says the words: "If thou art not yet baptized, then I baptize thee in the name..."

[...]



## Chapter 8

*“Bury your dead yourselves with songs and prayers.” (Bishop of Paderborn.)*

[...]

The mourners accompany the coffin to the cemetery. A cross is at the front of the procession. On the way, prayers are said for the deceased. After the burial, a prayer is said for the repose of his soul, then for all those who rest in the cemetery, and finally for a happy death for the one of the congregation whom the Lord will call away first. A hymn can be sung at the grave, as well as beforehand on the way there. Instead of a Requiem, a prayer meeting is held for the deceased either immediately after the funeral or, otherwise, he or she is specially remembered during the communal service. In this way, the relatives are comforted and the deceased is compensated for the lack of church celebrations.

## Chapter 9

# *[About marriages]*

[...]

The essence of marriage consists in the mutual, uncoerced, well thought out consent of the spouses to take each other in marriage. But for the marriage to be valid, it must be entered into in accordance with the conditions laid down by the Church for its validity. [...] The so-called civil marriage is not an ecclesiastically valid marriage, but merely has a civil effect. The Church requires for marriages:

1) that no impediment to marriage exists between the bride and groom or, if such an impediment exists, that it be removed beforehand by ecclesiastical dispensation;

2) that the bride and groom declare their mutual consent to the marriage in the presence of their own parish priest and two witnesses.

[This is followed by a long explanation about various impediments to marriage. Some make marriage impossible, such as a pre-existing marriage, or consanguinity; other impediments make the marriage illicit but valid (e.g. a vow of chastity or belonging to another denomination). The Church can dispense from the latter.]

[...]

1. The priest [or bishop] must be one's own parish priest [or bishop]; this is the case if either the bride or the groom lives in his parish. If he is unable to provide pastoral care, but can still be reached easily (by traveling), the couple may go to him.

2. With the permission of the bishop or parish priest, the marriage may be contracted before another priest.

3. No ecclesiastically valid marriages may be contracted before a clergyman who is not nominated by the Church but merely by the secular authorities as a parish priest.

As long as it is at all possible, a Roman Catholic priest must be sought out. [...]

But what if whole regions were without a priest and a priest could not be reached even by traveling? There is also advice for this. For important reasons, the pope can dispense from the application of the provision of the Tridentine Council and allow a valid marriage to be contracted without the presence of a priest.

At the time of the aforementioned revolution in France, the ecclesiastical blessing of marriages was completely impossible there. Most of the priests had been driven out, many had been murdered, and only a few were still hiding here and there. [...] In 1793, Pius VI issued a rescript in which it says: "Since the majority of the faithful there cannot have a legitimate parish priest at all, marriages contracted by them before witnesses, without the presence of a parish priest, will be both valid and permitted if nothing else (that is, no impediment to marriage) stands in the way, as has been repeatedly declared by Sacred Congregation of the Interpreters of the Council of Trent."

The Congregation mentioned here by the pope (S. Congregatio Cardinalium Concilii Trid. Interpretum) declared, for example, on Sept. 26, 1602: "If a parish church is vacant, i.e. without a parish priest, and likewise the cathedral church is without a bishop and chapter, who have the authority to delegate (i.e. authorize) another priest to bless a marriage; and there is no one else there, who represents the parish priest or the bishop, then the marriage is valid without the presence of the parish priest, provided that the norms of the Council are observed, where it is possible, that is, at least two witnesses are present. If the parish priest or the bishop are there, but both of them have gone into hiding out of fear of the heretics, without nominating a representative, and one doesn't know where there are; or if they are staying outside of the diocese due to this fear, and one cannot get to either of them safely (*si non sit tutus accessus*), then the marriage contracted without the Tridentine form (without a parish priest) is valid, provided that there are two witnesses, as stated."

The term "representative" is to be understood here as any priest who is authorized by the parish priest (for the parish) or the bishop (for the entire

diocese) to bless marriages. The case established by the Sacred Congregation would therefore only occur if the bride and groom were unable to find a legitimate Roman Catholic priest. It is also assumed that there is no impediment to marriage, or that it has previously been lifted by a dispensation.

[According to the current Code of Canon Law, the parish priest or the bishop may also assign a deacon to represent him.]

[...]

## *Part II*

# DEATH WITHOUT A PRIEST

“Dying persons fulfill their duty of conscience when they awaken perfect contrition and sorrow.” (Swiss Church Ordinance)

“In danger of death, if you cannot have a faithful priest, awaken an act of perfect contrition which, with the desire for the Sacrament [of Confession], purifies the soul from the sins clinging to it. Divine grace is indeed necessary for such perfect contrition, but God will give you this grace more abundantly if you humbly ask Him for it.” (Bishop of Paderborn)

“If you are deprived of the holy sacraments through no fault of your own, but stand firm in faith, then God’s grace will replace everything.” (The United Shepherds)

The most terrible thing for the faithful is the thought of having to die without the Holy Sacraments after the loss of their pastors. But take comfort! Even if the lack of a priest will be felt most painfully on the sick and dying bed, you will certainly attain the crown of eternal life if you stand firm in faith and cooperate faithfully with the grace of God. God wants the salvation of all people and therefore also gives everyone sufficient grace to do so: this is a matter of faith. He has ordained two kinds of means through which man is to acquire grace, namely the sacraments and prayer. If it is impossible to receive the sacraments, God attaches all the more grace to the prayer connected with the desire for the sacraments: if one source dries up, the other will flow all the more abundantly. Thus baptism with water can be replaced by baptism of desire and blood, real Communion by spiritual Communion, the Sacrament of Penance by perfect contrition. In accordance with this, faith also teaches that those who are outside the true Church through no fault of their own, but who earnestly seek the truth and keep the commandments, will be saved. How much more may the faithful children of the Church hope for salvation! Those who are lost are not lost through God’s fault, through lack of grace, but through their own fault, through lack of cooperation.

[...]

## *Chapter 10*

# *How to prepare for death when one is healthy*

“Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”  
Matthew 24:42.

1. Always remain in the state of sanctifying grace, then at least you will be safe from hell. So flee serious sin and the opportunity to do so.

2. Be diligent and conscientious in the fulfillment of your Christian duties and the duties of your state in life. A faithful worker need not be frightened when he is suddenly called before his master.

3. Fulfill such conditions as will enable you to obtain a plenary indulgence at the hour of death.

4. Frequently awaken a perfect contrition for your sins. A detailed teaching on this most important means of preparation will follow. [...]

5. Reconcile with your enemy, make restitution for other people's property, compensate as much as possible for the damage done. Put your temporal affairs in order.

6. Pray often for the grace of a happy death. This important petition is attached to the Hail Mary: “Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death!” Whoever has invoked the Mother of God in this way many thousands of times during his life (e.g. in the Rosary), she will certainly help him in his last hour. Also receive diligently the Holy Sacraments while you still have the opportunity.

[...]

## *Chapter 11*

# *How to behave at the time of illness and when death is approaching.*

1. If you should fall into a serious illness, do not be alarmed, but lift up your heart immediately to God, without whose will not a hair falls from our head. What God does is well done. Illnesses are graces, death is our friend who leads us to God in the heavenly Fatherland. Did not Jesus also die? Did not Mary, the saints, the elect all enter into eternal life through death?

2. Do not delay the reception of the Holy Sacraments when the opportunity arises. But if there is no priest, place unlimited trust in the mercy of God; see in God your most gracious Father, in Jesus your most loving Savior, in Mary your most tender Mother. In this case, holy Confession and Anointing of the Sick must be replaced by perfect contrition, and the Viaticum [last Holy Communion] by spiritual communion; the indulgence in the hour of death remains if you have fulfilled the conditions for which it is granted. Then, first and foremost, awaken a perfect contrition [sorrow for one's sins based upon love for God] [...] for the sins you have committed throughout your life with the desire for the Sacrament of Penance, ask for forgiveness through Jesus' blood and death on the cross: thereby you will secure sanctifying grace for yourself. Such contrition, as will be shown later, can also be awakened only in thought and in short heartfelt sighs. [...] [O]ffer up your life to God, declare yourself ready to die if it is His most holy will; accept in advance all the sufferings of the agony from God's hand as penance for your sins; call with great confidence on the



most Holy Name of Jesus with your mouth or, if you can no longer do so with your mouth, with your heart. [...]

3. If you still have obligations to fulfill, e.g. reconciliation, restitution, then do it immediately. Put your temporal affairs in order as soon as possible if you have not yet done so. If you are afraid of death because you have to leave your spouse, your children, your relatives, then have faith in God; commend them to the heavenly Father, He will take care of them. If a temptation against the faith comes up, then say immediately: "I believe everything that the Holy Catholic Church teaches, I want to live and die in this holy faith!" [...]

4. Do not spend the time of your illness with useless conversations or with excessive care for the health of the body. Converse with God, take care of your soul. [...] Pray the penitential psalms, a litany, the rosary; read in a spiritual book or have it read to you, especially about the Passion of Christ.

5. If you cannot exert yourself much in praying and reading because of weakness or pain, then lift up your mind to God all the more often with short heartfelt sighs and short prayers. [...]

If your strength leaves you completely and you can no longer pray, then press the crucifix firmly against you and at least invoke the names of Jesus and Mary in your heart. [...]

O would that in death you could say with Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." [2 Timothy 4:7] Then you too, like him, will receive the crown of righteousness. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." [Rev. 2:10] "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. [...] 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" [Rev. 22:12 and 22:20]

[...]

## Chapter 12

# *How to assist the sick and dying.*

Christ himself is visited and comforted in the sick. This work of love has a great promise, for on the day of general judgment the Lord will say to the blessed: “I was sick and you visited me” [Mt 25:36] [...] But to help the dying to have a blissful death is the most meritorious work of all and at the same time a most effective means of attaining the grace of a blessed death. [...] St. Augustine says: “If you have saved a soul, you have secured the election of your soul” [...].

1. You must be helpful to the sick person in all his needs, in attendance, hygiene, care, food and drink, night watches, and so on. Above all, however, look after the salvation of his soul! Comfort him, encourage him to trust in God, to surrender to the most holy will of God. Exhort him especially to awaken a heartfelt repentance for all his sins and help him to do so. Let him awaken a heartfelt desire for the sacraments, practice spiritual communion, and, if the illness is serious, remind him of the indulgence at the point of death. Ask if he still has an issue on his conscience, and if so, help him to put it in order, e.g. reconciliation, restitution, etc. [...]

2. All things that could cause the sick person temptation or even distract his mind are to be removed from the room [...].

3. All useless, vain, entirely worldly conversations should be avoided with the sick person. Always try to keep him in union with God. While you are busy in the sick room, you can give the sick person various pious reminders. For example, when you prepare his bed, you can say: “Behold, you still have a soft bed on which to rest; but Jesus had to hang on the cross on nails, He had nowhere to rest His thorn-crowned head.” [...]

4. Exhort the sick person to pray, help him to pray e.g. a litany, the

rosary, pray aloud, especially awaken the three divine virtues [faith, hope and love] and contrition and sorrow; read to him from a spiritual book what is suitable for his condition.

5. When the sick person's condition worsens and death approaches, love and care must be redoubled. All inquisitive onlookers are to be removed from the dying room. [...]

6. Keep the candle for the dead ready and frequently sprinkle the dying person with holy water, if available. Recite the prayers for the dying. In particular, the exercises of faith, hope and love, perfect contrition, trust, submission to the divine will and the desire for heaven should be practiced with the dying person. When praying aloud, one should not speak too loudly so as not to make the dying person uncomfortable. Do not pray too quickly or too much at once, but pause from time to time so that the dying person has time to reflect on what he has heard. Remind him that it is enough if he prays in his heart, in his thoughts, and that he does not need to pray with his mouth. Short prayers and heartfelt invocations [...] are best suited for this purpose[.]

7. When the dying person is in his last breaths, one should recite to him the last sighs of the dying, but one should especially invoke the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. The unconsciousness of the dying is often only apparent; their soul can be very active inwardly. — Once the soul has departed, it should be commended to the mercy of God.

[...]

## *Part III*

PERFECT CONTRITION IS A  
SOURCE OF GRACE IN LIFE AND A  
LIFELINE IN DEATH

## Chapter 13

# *What is perfect contrition?*

Contrition is a sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again. It is divided into imperfect and perfect contrition. Imperfect contrition arises from fear of hell and the loss of heaven; it is sufficient for Confession if it is accompanied by a beginning of love for God. Perfect contrition, on the other hand, also called filial or loving contrition, arises from perfect love for God; it is a heartfelt, bitter sorrow for our sins because we have thereby offended God, the highest and most lovable good. The fear of hell and the hope of heaven need not be excluded from perfect contrition, but must take a back seat. The truly loving person longs for heaven in order to be united with the God of his heart, and fears hell only because there he would be eternally separated from God; from the greatness of the punishment he recognizes the greatness of the insult inflicted on God. The real reason for his repentance, however, is love for God [...]. From this love then springs an exceedingly great pain at having offended such a lovable God, a true hatred and abhorrence of sin and the firm resolution to rather lose everything and endure even the bitterest death than to offend God by a grave sin, also to avoid all venial sins as offenses against the highest good to the best of one's ability, to use the means necessary for correction, to do penance and to make amends for the bad consequences of sin as far as possible.

St. Mary Magdalene was filled with such remorse when she wept at the feet of Jesus; St. Peter when he went out and wept bitterly; the thief on the cross when he said to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." [Lk 23:42] St. Paul had this firm resolution

when he affirmed: “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Rom 8:38-39]; likewise St. Anselmus, who declared: “If I saw on the one side a fiery furnace and on the other a venial sin, I would rather be thrown into the furnace than offend God by a venial sin.”

Truly grateful love, that is, that love which thinks not so much of the gifts but rather of God, the Giver and loves Him above all things because of His infinite mercy, is a perfect love and therefore the contrition that springs from it is also a perfect contrition. The same is true of filial love. [...]

## *Chapter 14*

# *What is the effect of perfect contrition?*

A person can obtain forgiveness for grave sins in three ways: first, through the Sacrament of Baptism; second, through the Sacrament of Penance; third, through perfect contrition in connection with the desire for the Sacrament [of Penance]. The Church teaches that perfect contrition, combined with the desire for the Sacrament (Baptism for the unbaptized, Penance for the baptized), reconciles the sinner with God even before he actually receives the Sacrament, and obtains forgiveness for all his sins. Perfect contrition presupposes the perfect love of God, but this and the state of mortal sin cannot exist together in the soul; that love cancels out that state, its fierce fire consumes the sin. Examples are David, Mary Magdalene, Peter, the thief on the cross, etc. The Lord said of Magdalene: “her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much” [Lk 7:47]

Perfect contrition therefore justifies the sinner, not only in an emergency and in danger of death, but in general and always, if it is truly present. But because in the New Covenant, according to Christ’s command, every serious sin is to be subjected to the power of binding and loosing of the Church, this contrition must be accompanied by the desire to go to confession. However, this need not be an explicit one, but the desire for the Sacrament, which is inherent in perfect love, or the firm intention to do everything that God requires, is sufficient. The Council of Trent teaches: “The council teaches furthermore, that though it happens sometimes that this contrition is perfect through charity and reconciles man to God before this sacrament is actually received, this reconciliation, nevertheless, is

not to be ascribed to the contrition itself without a desire of the sacrament, which desire is included in it.” Council of Trent, 14th Sess. 4 Ch. If we therefore go to confession at the next opportunity: this is a duty, because it is Christ’s commandment. The uncertainty as to whether our contrition has been truly perfect also compels us to do so. A culpable postponement of confession after having committed a grave sin would be a fairly certain sign that the contrition which one may have awakened over this sin was only an imperfect one and did not eradicate mortal sin.



## Chapter 15

# *When should perfect contrition be awakened?*

1. Although imperfect contrition is sufficient for Confession, we should nevertheless seek to awaken perfect contrition. The fruits of the Sacrament of Penance depend primarily on contrition. The more heartfelt it is, the more temporal punishment will be forgiven us along with eternal punishment, and the greater the measure of sanctifying and other graces that will be bestowed upon us. But if repentance is completely lacking, then Confession is invalid. [...] Repentance must be awakened before absolution.

2. It is advisable, apart from Confession, to make perfect contrition more often, for example every evening or on Sundays, even after committing entirely voluntary venial sins, especially if we doubt whether the sin was venial or grave. Two reasons should prompt us to do this.

First, we never have undoubted certainty as to whether we are in the state of sanctifying grace. [...] Even the great world apostle Paul confesses of himself: “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.” 1 Cor 4:4. [...] However, this uncertainty should not fill us with despair, but with salutary fear. “[W]ork out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Phil. 2:12. Frequent heartfelt repentance softens this fear, for the psalmist says: “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” [Psalms 51:17]. Thus, contrition of love, if it continually fills our hearts, secures us the mercy of God and with it our eternal salvation.

But even supposing that we are in the state of sanctifying grace, there is another reason why we should often awaken perfect contrition. This second reason is its great merit. It obtains for us the pardon of venial sins, into which we fall daily, and diminishes our temporal punishment, thereby shortening the punishment in Purgatory that awaits us. It also increases in us God's grace and love of God, strengthens us for good and thus contributes to the increase of our hoped-for happiness in Heaven. [...] On earth the love of God cannot exist without the pain of having offended this most lovable God so often: perfect contrition is, as it were, the earthly form of perfect love.

3. In particular, the Christian should awaken perfect contrition when he has had the misfortune to fall into grave sin. Never lie down to sleep in mortal sin, you could wake up in hell! It is also a doctrine of faith that you cannot earn treasures for heaven in a state of mortal sin. Should you ever fall into serious sin, then seek to reconcile yourself immediately with God you have offended through true contrition of love. Accuse yourself of your guilt before Him, plead for forgiveness, ask for time and grace for Confession and conversion. [...] However, you do not need to feel this pain sensually, because repentance is a spiritual pain, a pain of the soul, a movement not of feeling but of the will. Should you suddenly die without the Holy Sacraments after such heartfelt contrition of love, then you will find in God a reconciled and merciful judge who will not cast you off forever. If, however, the Lord is granting you your life, then go to Holy Confession as soon as you have the opportunity. [...]

4. Finally, in death, this repentance is the only means of salvation in the case of grave sin and in the absence of the Holy Sacraments. We can trust that God will grant the necessary grace to those who are of truly good will and have no opportunity to confess. This applies in particular to pious Catholics who die an unexpected death and to those people who live and die outside the Catholic Church through no fault of their own, but who have sought the truth and practiced virtue to the best of their ability. Even a heretic, a Jew, a Turk, a pagan, can still be saved by turning to God on his deathbed, asking for forgiveness with perfect contrition of love and at the same time wishing to do and receive what he recognizes as necessary for salvation by the grace of God. God wants all men to be saved, he offers His saving hand to all, and only those who reject it will perish. As will be shown later, perfect contrition can be awakened with the heart in an

instant with the help of a special divine grace. Grace sometimes ignites suddenly in the soul, like a flash of lightning. But insofar as we have to cooperate, this contrition in death will become all the easier the more often and heartily we have practiced it in life. —

## Chapter 16

# *How can perfect contrition be awakened?*

[...] Every person, even the most simple-minded and unlearned, even the greatest sinner, can and should awaken it; indeed, under certain circumstances, his eternal salvation depends on it. On the other hand, this contrition should not be taken too lightly. Rather, it requires a firm, determined will on the part of man and a special, extraordinary grace on the part of God. But God does not deny these graces to anyone who fervently asks him for them and cooperates to the best of his ability.

Many words will not be enough; repentance must be in the heart. St. Francis once sighed to God for a whole night: “O my God and my everything! O my God and my everything: O most sweet my God and my everything” That was perfect love. Perfect contrition can be awakened in similar brief expressions. David, who was guilty of adultery and murder, only said, “I have sinned against the LORD”, and immediately heard the prophet say, “The LORD also has put away your sin.” [2 Sam 12] The tax collector beat his breast and said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”, and he went home justified. [Lk 18:13] Both had in their hearts a deep love for God and an exceedingly great sorrow for the offense they had caused Him, together with a firm resolve to mend their ways and do enough, even though they did not express all this in words.

The surest signs of perfect contrition are corresponding deeds, namely early confession, if possible, true amendment of life; fleeing from occasions for sin; reconciliation with one’s neighbor; works of penance; zeal in prayer, in the fulfillment of the duties of one’s state of life, in the ex-

ercise of charity, etc. Perfect love and contrition is not a flickering and soon extinguished straw fire, but an ember that ignites and lasts in the heart. Through frequent awakening, the innere embers receive new nourishment and are fanned into a flame. Heartfelt tears of repentance, as with Magdalene and Peter, are a special grace, but by no means necessary.

Perfect contrition is, as I said, a grace that is obtained through prayer and cooperation. Therefore, pray more often and with fervor for a true heartfelt contrition of love. [...] [T]urn to Mary, the refuge of sinners. Furthermore, since you must first recognize your sins in order to repent of them, examine your conscience diligently, if possible every evening (especially about your main fault). Self-examination and self-knowledge will open your eyes to the countless and great offenses you have already committed against your God. Punish yourself through works of penance according to your circumstances and the gravity of your transgressions. Such works are: fasting or at least a little abstinence from food and drink, mortification of the eyes and tongue, abstinence from a lawful pleasure, almsgiving, especially the patient endurance of suffering and affliction as penance for sins. [...]